

# Climate change denial on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and TikTok is 'as bad as ever'

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The climate is changing, but misinformation about it on the major social media platforms is not.

Climate change falsehoods, hoaxes and conspiracy theories are still prevalent on Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube despite pledges to crack down, a new report says.

Social media posts and videos denying [climate change](#), disputing its causes or underplaying its effects not only can still be found on these platforms, they are often missing warning labels or links to credible information, according to Advance Democracy, a research organization that studies [misinformation](#).

Climate scientists say they're frustrated by the lack of progress in stemming the tide of [climate](#) change misinformation. For years, they've urged social media companies to identify, flag and take down the misinformation and the accounts that spread it.

Last year, Twitter added a new climate topic to direct users to credible information on climate change. Facebook expanded information labels on posts about climate change to direct users to its "Climate Science Information Center" and YouTube stopped running ads denying climate change.

But, says Michael Mann, director of Penn State University's Earth System Science Center and author of "The New Climate War," "it's as bad as ever."

John Cook, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Climate Change Communication Research Hub at Monash University who advises Facebook, says the proliferation of climate misinformation on social media reflects the torrent of misinformation coming from a combination of science denial and skepticism about climate policy and renewable fuels and technologies.

"One element of climate misinformation that seems to be particularly

prominent on social media is culture war type posts that attempt to paint people concerned about climate change as belonging to some separate social group intent on impinging on people's freedoms," Cook said. "This is a particularly damaging form of misinformation as it exacerbates public polarization on climate change, making progress more difficult."

## **'Climate fraud,' 'climate change hoax' still popular on Twitter**

Last May, Advance Democracy found hundreds of thousands of posts on Twitter denying climate change. A week later, Twitter added a new climate topic to direct users to credible information on climate change.

ADI says the number of posts with climate change denial terms such as "climate fraud," "climate change hoax," or "climate cult" increased after the climate topic was introduced and averaged 679 a day in the second half of 2021. Climate change denial spiked during the U.N. COP 26 climate summit, Advance Democracy found.

Three of the five accounts that received the most engagements in 2021 for posts denying climate change referenced "Grand Solar Minimum," the [false belief](#) that the Grand Solar Minimum, a period of low solar activity, will cool the planet and cause the next ice age.

In all, there were some 231,800 posts using climate change denial terms from approximately 77,540 accounts, Advance Democracy says.

"We recognize that more can be done on services like Twitter to elevate credible climate information, and we continue to evolve our approach," Twitter spokesperson Elizabeth Busby said in a statement.

## **Climate change denial posts still lack labels on Facebook**

Internal documents provided to USA TODAY and other news organizations by whistleblower Frances Haugen showed that Facebook is a primary source of climate information for users.

Last May, Facebook said it would expand informational labels on some Facebook posts about climate change in the U.S. The labeled posts would link to its Climate Science Center.

Advance Democracy says 7,290 posts using climate change denial terms generated 800,760 interactions (meaning reactions, comments and shares) in 2021. Two of the most popular posts in the U.S. in the second half of 2021 were not labeled.

"We combat climate change misinformation by connecting people to reliable information from leading organizations through our Climate Science Center and working with a global network of independent fact checkers to review and rate content," Facebook spokesman Kevin McAlister said in a statement. "When they rate this content as false, we add a warning label and reduce its distribution so fewer people see it. We also take action against Pages, Groups, and accounts that repeatedly share false claims about climate science."

## **YouTube 'information panels' missing from videos**

According to YouTube guidelines, when a viewer searches or watches videos "prone to misinformation," an informational panel should appear with background information from independent third-party sources. YouTube also prohibits ads that promote climate change misinformation.

Advance Democracy says no information panels popped up on video searches for 10 key phrases associated with climate change denial but did turn up an ad from Amazon linking to books that deny the existence of climate change.

YouTube says it surfaces videos from authoritative sources in search results and puts informational panels under videos.

"In general, our systems don't recommend or prominently surface content that includes climate change misinformation," YouTube spokesperson Elena Hernandez said in a statement. "We're always working to expand and improve how we connect viewers to authoritative content about climate change."

It also removed ads flagged in the Advance Democracy report for violating its policies on climate change denial.

## **TikTok videos generate 1.53 million views**

Videos using hashtags associated with climate change denial generated 1.53 million views. The videos were not labeled. TikTok's guidelines do not specifically address climate change misinformation.

A small percentage of the hashtags associated with climate change denial were being used for counter-messaging, Advance Democracy found. A search for #grandsolarminimum turned up no videos dispelling the hoax.

TikTok said it removed the accounts and content that violated its policies after USA TODAY inquired.

"Our community values authentic content, and we do too, which is why we work with accredited fact checkers to evaluate content and limit the spread of false or misleading information when we identify it," company

spokesperson A.B. Obi-Okoye said in a statement.

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